

HEALTH DEPARTMENT & BOARD OF HEALTH

Fiscal Year 2004

The mission of the Amherst Board of Health, working through the Health Department, is to promote the health and wellbeing of our community. We fulfill this mission through our core functions: assessment, assurance, promotion, and policy development.

Assurance: Ensuring that all Amherst residents have the services necessary to maintain or restore good health either by coordinating the delivery of services by other agencies, by policy or regulation development, or by providing services directly

Assessment: Systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making available information regarding the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, and epidemiological studies of health problems

Promotion: Providing services and educational opportunities that encourage healthy environments and healthy lifestyles

Policy Development: Development and implementation of comprehensive public health policies, regulations and legislation.

The work of the Amherst Health Department is organized into six major areas: Access to Health Care, Infectious Disease Control, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Environmental Health, Health Policy and Planning and Emergency Preparedness.

I. Access to Health Care

Ensuring access to health care for all Amherst residents continues to be a priority for the Department. Many of our programs focus on assuring access to health care for Amherst residents. Some of these programs are: Hampshire Health Connect, "Peace in the Family: a Khmer Community Project" and the Convalescent Equipment Loan Program. Due to budget cuts, the Health Department was not able to provide significant services to the newcomer Latino community during this year. We hope to find a way to reinstate these services.

Hampshire Health Connect

Hampshire Health Connect (HHC) is a nonprofit organization created by a group of citizens, providers and representatives of local government, businesses and the insurers. Its aim is to link families and individuals who are underinsured or who have no health insurance with insurance programs that they may be eligible for or to medical providers willing to see HHC patients at no charge or on a sliding fee scale. The HHC is housed in Cooley Dickinson Hospital. The Health Director, Epi Bodhi, is currently secretary of the Board of Directors of HHC.

Thanks to several grants, HHC was able to engage the services of a Latina caseworker who has been working out of the Amherst Health Department to enroll all Amherst residents, but especially those whose first language is Spanish, in the program.

Cambodian Health

Many Cambodian Americans live in the Amherst area. The Department has identified many unmet needs of this population. "Peace in the Family: A Khmer Community Project" has

been a part of the Department services since 1997. Due to a lack of funding in FY 04, the Outreach Worker position was cut. The impact of this cut especially affected domestic violence victims and the elderly. Clients cannot be referred to other agencies because there is no Cambodian mutual assistance association in Western Massachusetts. Most local social service agencies do not have Khmer-speaking staff.

However, because of our work with Khmer Health Advocates, an organization based in Hartford that offers medical and mental health services for Cambodians, the Health Department was a recipient of equipment to provide Telemedicine services. The Khmer Health Advocates offered a small grant to the Health Department so that we could facilitate members of Amherst's Cambodian community talking face to face with medical providers based in Hartford.

In addition we received a small grant from the RSVP program which allowed our Outreach worker to continue on a very limited basis.

Convalescent Equipment Lending Program

Kathryn Drake, Health Department Office Administrator, receives convalescent equipment such as walkers, commodes, shower benches, tub safety rails, canes, crutches, and a limited number of wheelchairs through donations and maintains a loan closet for citizens in need. Forty-nine Amherst residents borrowed sixty-eight pieces of convalescent equipment during FY 04.

II. Infectious Disease Control

Controlling the spread of communicable diseases and food-borne illnesses is an important function of the Health Department.

Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control during FY 04 included the following:

- 3 cases of active Tuberculosis
- 32 cases of Tb prevention and control
- 16,320 doses of vaccine distributed to eleven Amherst providers
- annual flu clinic, in conjunction with the Council on Aging, provided vaccines for flu and tetanus to 254 residents
- immunization Clinics held monthly provided 225 immunizations to adults and children
- 3 cases of Salmonella, 2 cases of Giardia, 4 cases of Campylobacter, 4 cases of chickenpox, 19 cases of Pertussis, 5 cases of Hepatitis, 21 cases of Lyme Disease, 2 cases Shigella, 3 cases of Cryptosporidiosis, 1 case of Haemophilus Influenzae, 1 case of malaria.

III. Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease are another important aspect of the Health Department's work. Programs and interventions are either for the general public or are targeted to certain groups that are at increased health risk because of their membership in a particular demographic, or as consequences of their own behaviors or the behaviors of others.

High risk groups

- The Public Health Nurse and Inspectors work together in a team approach to address the multi-faceted problem of hoarding, via joint inspections that include mental health assessments and referrals to social services.
- The Health Director and Public Health Nurse have begun work with the Council on Aging to ensure that seniors are offered high quality nursing services.
- Emergency planning and bioterrorism response planning continues at the Town, state and county level.
- Town of Amherst Handicapped Permits are available to residents of Amherst who have a temporary or chronic condition that substantially limits their mobility. This permit allows residents to park in handicapped spaces within the Town of Amherst. This permit WILL NOT extend any privileges beyond Town limits, or to the area colleges. A permit may be obtained from the Amherst Health Department. A doctor's certificate stating the condition and the expected duration of the disability is required.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse Education

The Health Director continues to be active in several Town, University, and school efforts to examine alcohol abuse, underage drinking, and substance abuse. Results of a high school survey of students' abuse of alcohol and drugs revealed a serious situation. The Amherst Board of Health received a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1999 to help address this problem of substance abuse in the high school. This has enabled us to hire a Health Educator, Kathy Wicks, to help coordinate the work of the Amherst Drug Free Community Partnership. The OJJDP grant is in its third year of funding. Work to develop and maintain a secure organizational structure and build stronger relationships among the key players continues. Strengthening the coalition is an ongoing focus of the Partnership. The Partnership continues to support existing local youth programs, pilot new programs, and develop messages that discourage alcohol and other drug use among youth in Amherst. The Partnership has explored other strategies of substance use prevention and will continue to initiate action in this regard with youth and adults.

Programs targeting youth that the Partnership funded included, for the second year in a row, hosting the Challenge Day Program for 200 youth and 40 adults. This program is designed to engage youth in an interactive process where youth challenge themselves to understand different forms of oppression that exist in our society and which are often the basis of behavior affecting the social climate at their school (such as violence, drug and alcohol use, truancy, bullying, etc.). This program is an integral part of the school district's effort to improve the climate of the school. The Partnership was also involved in two of the Challenge Day follow-up events, a breakfast and a lunch where students were "challenged" to mix things up and sit with students according to their birth month whom they may not have ever talked to before. The program and the follow-up events were considered a huge success by the students, the school administration, parents, and other community participants. Other programs targeting youth that the Partnership supported this year include a youth/family support program run by the Family Outreach of Amherst, the Big Brothers, Big Sisters mentoring component of the Diversion Program, a peer social marketing campaign, and youth scholarships for the LSSE Outdoor Challenge Camp.

Parents are another target audience in the effort to reduce substance and alcohol use. This year the Partnership was actively involved in working with the high school and the High

School Parent Center to involve parents in sharing strong non-use messages with their teens. Using data from the parent survey conducted last year, posters and brochures were tested this year and will be ready for the social norms media marketing campaign that will be launched in September. Social norms marketing is a cutting edge public health strategy that challenges misperceptions about behavior and replaces it with actual data, so that healthy behavior ultimately becomes the uncontested norm. Other programs that the Partnership helped plan and/or support this year include the first annual Amherst Regional High School Parent Conference, the Study Circle initiative that was organized by the ARHS Parent Center to build community and engage in the topic of race and class that is an underlying factor in how youth and families experience this community, and the Safe Schools/Health Students Parent guide.

Both a parent and a youth survey were administered in the spring of 2003. The youth survey was done in collaboration with the Safe Schools Initiative and was administered for the second time, in the spring of 2004. This data will be used to continue to monitor our progress in the community around Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) use among youth, but we will also use the information to develop a social norms marketing campaign to challenge the misperceptions around AOD use among youth.

IV. Environmental Issues

The Board of Health is required by state statute and regulations to perform many important and crucial duties relating to the protection of public health, disease control and the promotion of sanitary living conditions. On behalf of the Board of Health, Environmental Health Services staff for FY 04 conducted 1,252 inspections and issued 397 permits.

Food Safety

The Health Department issues food permits for all food service establishments, including restaurants and food service facilities in stores, recreational camps, bed and breakfasts, colleges, hotels, motels, retail food, schools and mobile food units.

We enforce Chapter X of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standard for Food Establishments, 105 CMR 590.000. This code, along with the Federal Food Code, allows us to conduct inspections, issue orders and suspend or revoke permits where necessary.

The Health Department regularly inspects the eighty-four food handlers in Amherst. These include retail, bakery and catering establishments. Since the state's adoption of the 1999 Federal Food Code, the Health Department has worked to help local restaurants comply. The code requires that all restaurants have a person in charge (PIC) that has knowledge of food-borne disease prevention and application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. Along with the HACCP principles we have helped train personnel at the food establishments in anti-choking procedures. This year will include continued monitoring of food managers to ensure that they obtain Food Manager Certification and to develop a food protection program in several languages.

Body Art Establishments

The Town has seen an increase in applications for Body Art establishments, and the Health Department has developed and implemented new Body Art and Massage Therapy regulations.

Recreational Camps

The number of recreational camps in the Town has increased, along with the number of children attending these camps. This change has increased the monitoring and number of inspections needed to maintain quality and compliance in operation of these camps. The state Department of Public Health has added additional regulations to the recreational camp requirements.

Housing

The Health Department is working to ensure that all the residents are provided with safe, high-quality housing. During FY 04, the Health Department was involved in the emergency condemnation of 10 rental units that violated sanitary codes. In FY 04, 141 housing inspections were conducted.

Precautionary Principle

The Health Director continues to be actively involved in a statewide coalition to apply the Precautionary Principle, which states:

“When an activity raises the threat of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not established scientifically.”

West Nile Virus

The Department continues to educate residents about measures to prevent becoming infected with West Nile Virus (WNV). In FY 04, 29 dead birds were reported for surveillance purposes to the Health Department; of these 9 birds were submitted for testing and 6 of these birds were found to be positive for WNV. There was one confirmed human case.

Environmental Management System

With the cooperation of the Amherst School System, the Amherst Health Department is developing a plan to implement a pilot Environmental Management System (EMS) funded by the Department of Environmental Protection.

An EMS is a set of ongoing management processes and procedures that allow an organization to analyze, control, and reduce the negative environmental impact of its activities, products and services.

V. Emergency Preparedness

The Health Department has been very active in the area of emergency preparedness. One of the major projects includes development of a Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). The Health Department was awarded grant funding from the Federal government to initiate an MRC program, a national effort to organize local volunteer teams of trained medical and public health professionals. These volunteers could be called on during a local disaster or for other local public health efforts throughout the year. The Amherst MRC has the goal of enhancing the Town of Amherst's efforts to prepare and respond to emergencies that are beyond the scope of existing Town emergency response resources. Three main areas of focus will include assistance during sheltering of displaced residents, large scale vaccination or medication efforts, and assistance during decontamination operations. MRC volunteers will receive training in these areas through collaboration with the American Red Cross, and the Massachusetts Departments of Public Health and Fire Services. In addition, a leadership team

of volunteers will develop projects to enhance public health efforts in Amherst. MRC staff hired during FY 04 included Joshua Shanley, Disaster Resource Coordinator/MRC Director, and Kate Kelly, Health Educator/MRC Coordinator.

The Health Department is also coordinating the development of the *Community Emergency Response Team* (CERT), which is another Federal initiative designed to coordinate volunteer efforts during disasters. CERT member's primary mission is to safely provide care of injured people and perform basic safety functions if emergency response personnel are delayed due to an ongoing large scale emergency.

In addition to the MRC and CERT programs, Health Department personnel are active in regional efforts focused on disaster preparedness. Josh Shanley is the vice-chair of the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) and Director of the Hampshire Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition. Kate Kelly is also an active member of the LEPC. The Western Massachusetts Regional LEPC represents the 19 communities of Hampshire County and eight disciplines within those towns: Fire, Police, Community Services, Public Health, Media, Emergency Services, Chief Elected Officials and Public Works.

Health Department staff have been attending multi-discipline emergency preparedness trainings sponsored by the CDC and Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) pertaining to topics such as isolation and quarantine guidelines, mass immunization clinics, and field decontamination procedures and protocols. Additionally, the Health Department participated in a regional tabletop exercise that involved management of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) incident. A larger, functional exercise is planned for this fall involving testing procedures for distributing medication during a bioterrorism attack.

VI. Health Policy and Planning

The Board of Health is responsible for setting policies and creating regulations to protect the health of Amherst residents.

Health Planning

The Health Director is an active member and on the Board of Directors of NACCHO (National Association of County and City Health Officials.) She is a member of the Social Justice Committee as well as the Task Force to develop an operational definition of Local Public Health.

The Amherst Health Department was chosen by NACCHO to be one of nine demonstration sites for a strategic planning tool called MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership). This is an opportunity for the Health Department to work with the many institutions throughout Hampshire County that form the public health system so that we may better serve the health needs of all residents. To this end, the Health Department worked with the Hampshire County Partnership for Health, the United Way of Hampshire County and the Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth (SPIFFY) to gather information about the health status of residents and the capacity of our public health system to provide essential public health services. This information was compiled in a report that will be presented to the larger community.

Amherst was chosen as a site to begin exploring the links between land use planning and public health. The Director of the Health as well as the Planning Director was invited to a conference to begin this link.

FY 04 Board of Health

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